



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Human Services Committee, March 1, 2012
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Raised Bill no. 209, An Act Increasing Educational Incentives in the Jobs First Employment Services Program

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid and have represented many clients who seek cash and medical help from DSS. I also testified in support of last year's bill JFES pilot bill which passed. This bill makes some changes to that enactment, 17b-112k, authorizing a pilot program.

This bill would expand the pilot from 100 to 1000 families, but would narrow the services to vocational education and high school or equivalency. I fully support the expansion because there is much evidence that vocational education alongside high school education can be very effective to increase employability.

But I do regret that this bill eliminates provisions approved last year: assessment, case management and services targeted toward those with more profound needs. In my experience many participants in the Temporary Family Assistance jobs program, face multiple challenges. Domestic violence, mental health issues or a child with health problems and special child care needs can quickly scuttle a work situation. The Pilot approved last year was a chance to pay focused attention, address underlying issues and supply what is really needed to get back to work and keep working.

Connecticut does not have a good record of reinvesting TANF dollars in program improvement as caseloads have decreased. This year's budget projects a \$9 million dollar savings from caseload reduction. So it is puzzling that the budget also eliminates funding for the pilot that was approved last year—for a savings of \$150,000, a cost that represents a mere 1.6% of the projected saving to be realized from the TFA caseload reduction. I would urge that some of that savings be applied to the vocational and high school training proposed in this bill, *while also preserving the assessments and job support approved last year*. We should not miss this opportunity to bolster families so parents can truly succeed when they return to work.

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